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Abstract

The inventory presented here was produced by listing 13 sentence elements (subject, object, etc.) with specifications as to mutual exclusiveness and then presenting them tc a ccmputer with a request for permutaticns. Those items for which no examples could be found were excluded from the output, and the remaining patterns constitute the inventory given in this article. The list contains 518 patterns, whose frequency in written and spcken English ranges from very frequent tc very rare. It is hoped that the list will prove useful to language teachers. (FWB)

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AN INVENTORY OF SIMPLE SENTENCE PATTERNS OF ENGLISH [1]

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An inventory of simple sentence patterns of English may be useful to language teachers; in so far as it evidences "system" it may be of general interest.

If one thinks in terms of a dozen elements, it proves impractical to establish an inventory by organizing the patterns one intuitively produces. Computers allow one to exploit a different procedure. One lists the elements one is interested in, and one lists mutually excluding items. This information is then presented to the computer with a request for permutations. From the output one then excludes items for which exemplification cannot be thought of, and the remainder constitutes the inventory.

The elements of the inventory which follows are:

s	subject
si	subject, 'formal *it*'
st	subject, 'formal *there*'
o.	object
p	predicative adjunct to the subject
no	*not*
ne	*never*
f	finite verb, except *am are is was were*
fb	finite verb, *am are is was were*
a	'auxiliary', except items of fb
vs	non-finite verb stem
vd	non-finite verb stem + *-ed*
vg	non-finite verb stem + *- ing*

In the inventory, one ambiguity is deliberate: fb vg (e.g. *is smiling)* could also be described as fb p (i.e. as roughly equivalent to *is happy)*. For eventual users of the inventory who prefer not to do this it seemed gracious to include the relevant patterns. Users who are content to place this stem + *-ing* in a sub-class of p can simply exclude from the inventory all items which include both fb and vg. Stem + *-ed* items after *am are is was were* are considered p items, so that fb vd combinations do not occur.

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1. The English Language Institute, Victoria University of Wellington, is grateful to the University Research Committee for making the study possible.

Most patterns are easily exemplified. Some are archaic (no o f s *Not a word said he*). A few perhaps less obvious specimens are:

f p	Went sour?
f s	...," said John.
f s no p	Grew they not wiser?
s f vd p	He got elected chairman.
ne f vs o	Never helps do it? (!)
si a ne vd o	It has never rained frogs.

The inventory

o	ne vd o	ne a	f o	f s p	ne vs p
p	ne f vd	vs	no f p	s f o	ne vs o
f p	a ne vd	f vg o	no f o	f s o	ne f vs
f o	ne a vd	fb vg	ne f p	o s f	ne f vs o
a	a ne vd p	fb vg p	ne f o	s a	a ne vs
no	ne a vd p	fb vg o	s a no vs	a s	ne a vs
p no	a ne vd o	no vg	p vs	s fb p	a ne vs
no p	ne a vd o	no vg p	vs o	p s fb	a ne vs p
no o	vg	no vg o	f vs	p fb s	no o s f
no f p	vg p	fb no vg	f vs o	fb s p	s f o no
no f o	vg o	fb no vg p	a vs	s no	o f s no
ne a vs p	f vg	fb no vg o	a vs p	no s	s a no
a ne vs o	f vg p	ne vg	a vs o	s no p	a s no
ne a vs o	f o vg	ne vg p	no vs	s f no	a no s
vd	s fb ne p	ne vg o	no vs p	f s no	s fb no p
a vd	a no	ne f vg	no vs o	f no s	fb s no p
no vd	ne	ne f o vg	a no vs	s f no p	fb no s p
no vd p	p ne	fb ne vg	s	s f no o	p s fb no
no o vd	ne p	ne fb vg	s p	f s no p	s ne
no vd o	ne o	fb ne vg p	p s	no o f s	ne s
no f vd	ne f	fb ne vg o	s f	vs s ne a	s ne p
a no vd	ne f p	ne fb vg p	f s	a no vs p	ne s p
a no vd o	ne f o	ne fb vg o	s f p	a no vs o	s ne f
ne vd	a ne	f p	p s f	ne vs	s ne f p

p s ne f
s ne f o
o s ne f
o f s ne
o s f ne
ne s f o
s a ne
s ne a
a s ne
ne a s
s a vd p
s ne fb p
p s fb ne
p s ne a
p fb s ne
fb s ne p
ne fb s p
s vs
s vs p
s vs o
s f vs
s f vs o
o s f vs
s a vs
vs s a
vs a s
a s vs
s a vs p
p s a vs
p a s vs
s a p vs
a s vs p
s a vs o
o s a vs

o a s vs
vs o s a
a s vs o
vd o s ne a
ne a s vd o
s vg
vg s
s vg p
s vg o
s f vg
s f vg p
s f vg o
s fb vg
fb s vg
vg fb s
s fb vg p
fb s vg p
s fb vg o
fb s vg o
s no vg
no s vg
s no vg p
s no vg o
s fb no vg
fb s no vg
fb no s vg
s fb no vg p
p s fb no vg
fb s no vg p
fb no s vg p
vg p s fb no
si a no vs o
a no si vs o
si a ne vs

si ne a vs
a si ne vs
ne a si vs
vs si a ne
vs si ne a
si a ne vs p
si ne a vs p
a s no vs
a no s vs
vs s a no
s a no vs p
p s a no vs
p a s no vs
a s no vs p
a no s vs p
vs p s a no
vs p a s no
s a vs o no
s a no vs o
o s a vs no
o s a no vs
o a s vs no
o a s no vs
a s no vs o
vs o s a no
s ne vs p
s ne vs o
s ne f vs o
s a ne vs
s ne a vs
a s ne vs
ne a s vs
vs s a ne
s fb no vg o

o s fb no vg
fb s no vg o
fb no s vg o
vg o s fb no
s ne vg
s ne vg p
s ne vg o
s ne f vg
s ne f vg p
s ne f vg o
s fb ne vg
fb s ne vg
vg s ne fb
ne fb s vg
s fb ne vg p
fb s ne vg p
ne fb s vg p
s fb ne vg o
s ne fb vg o
o s fb ne vg
fb s ne vg o
vg o s ne fb
ne fb s vg o
ne fb si vg
fb si ne vg
si fb ne vs p
p si fb ne vg
p si ne fb vg
vg p si fb ne
vg p si ne fb

ne fb si vg p
fb si ne vg p
si fb ne vg o
s a ne vs p
p s a ne vs
p s ne a vs
a s ne vs p
vs p s a ne
vs p s ne a
ne a s vs p
s a ne vs o
s ne a vs o
o s a ne vs
o s ne a vs
a s ne vs o
vs o s a ne
vs o s ne a
ne a s vs o
s vd
vd s
s vd p
s vd o
s f vd
s f vd p
s a vd
a s vd
vd a s
vd s a
si f
si f p
p si f
si f o
si a

a si
no si
si a no
a no si
si fb
fb si
fb si p
si fb p
fb si no
fb no si
si fb no p
fb si no p
fb no si p
si fb vg
fb si vg
vg si fb
vg fb si
si fb vg o
o si fb vg
o fb si vg
vg o si fb
vg o fb si
vd si a ne
si a vd p
a si vd p
si a nc vd p
a si no vd p
a no si vd p
si a ne vd p
si ne a vd p
ne a si vd p
vd p si ne a
p a s vd
s p a vd
s no vd

s no vd p
no s vd
no s vd p
s a no vd
a s no vd
vd s a no
a no s vd
s a no vd p
p s a no vd
p a s no vd
a s no vd p
a no s vd p
s a ne vd
s ne a vd
a s ne vd
a ne s vd
ne a s vd
s a ne vd o
o s ne a vd
s ne a vd o
o s a ne vd
o a s ne vd
a s ne vd o
si fb no vg
fb no si vg
vg si fb no
si fb no vg o
o si fb no vg
vg o si fb no
si ne
si ne f
si ne f p
p si ne f
si ne f o
si a ne

si ne a
a si ne
si a vs
vs si a
vs a si
a si vs
si a vs p
p si a vs
p a si vs
a si vs p
si a vs o
a si vs o
si a no vs
a si no vs
vs si a no
si a no vs p
p fb st
fb st p
st f p
st a
a st
st fb no
fb st no
fb no st
st fb no p
fb no st p
p si a ne vs
p si ne a vs
a si ne vs p
vs p si a ne
vs p si ne a
ne a si vs p
si a ne vs o
si ne a vs o
o si a ne vs

o si ne a vs
a si ne vs o
vs o si a ne
vs o si ne a
si fb ne vg
vs si fb ne
vs si ne fb
st a vs
a st vs
st a vs p
p st a vs
p a st vs
a st vs p
st a no vs
a st no vs
a no st vs
st a no vs p
p st a no vs
a st no vs p
o si fb ne vg
o si ne fb vg
vg o si fb ne
vg o si ne fb
fb si ne vg o
ne fb si vg o
si a vd
a si vd
si a no vd
a si no vd
a no si vd
si a ne vd
si ne a vd
ne a si vd
vd si ne a
a si ne vd

a no st vs p
st a ne vs
st ne a vs
a st ne vs
ne a st vs
st a ne vs p
st ne a vs p
a st ne vs p
ne a st vs p
p a st ne vs
p st ne a vs
p st a ne vs
a si ne vd p
vd p si a ne
si a no vd o
a no si vd o
o si a no vd
si a ne vd o
si ne a vd o
o si a ne vd
o si ne a vd
ne a si vd o
a si ne vd o
st fb
fb st
st fb p
p st fb
st a vd p
st a vd
a st vd
p a st vd
st a no vd
a st no vd
a no st vd

st a no vd p
a no vd
o st vd p
t no vd p
st a ne vd
p fb no st
fb st no p
no p fb st
st a no
a st no
a no st

st ne fb
st ne fb p
st fb ne p
ne fb st p
p st ne fb
st ne f p
ne f st p
st ne a
a st ne
st ne a vd
a st ne vd

ne a st vd
st a ne vd p
st ne a vd p
p st ne a vd
p st a ne vd
a st ne vd p
ne a st vd p

518 items are listed. Their frequency of use in spoken and written English ranges, no doubt, from very frequent to very rare. Perhaps 70 have only marginal existence, but one must remember that children *do* experience f s o *Drove she ducklings... ,* p s fb *Right you are,* p st fb *A (fat) lot of work there was,* even p s ne fb *Bird thou never wert.* The addition of *sure* or *certainly* may make an otherwise improbable item acceptable: *Snowing it sure was!* The last six items in the inventory credibly permute: *There has never been a better man.*

Compared with the computer output, the residue is small; as experience for a learner to survive, it is formidable. Patterning in the formation of acceptable items is there if one looks for it, but many learners, and teachers, of English understandably judge this "syntactic baggage" complicated and uneconomical.